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Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

List of issues and questions in relation to the combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda

Addendum

Replies of Antigua and Barbuda*

[Date received: 15 November 2018]

Note: The present document is being circulated in English, French and Spanish only.
* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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Introduction

1. This document is responding to the List of Issues and Questions provided by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. An Annex of statistical information has been submitted with this report. All relevant Government Departments were involved in preparing the content and material for this report.

Response to the List of Issues

Constitutional & Legislative Framework

2. There have been no explicit or specific measures to incorporate gender equality principles into national legislation. However, there are plans to ensure, through gender mainstreaming initiatives, that gender and social assessments are conducted periodically which will be integrated into policies and legislation to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women both directly and indirectly in public and private spheres.

Access to Justice

3. Matters of sexual harassment, victimization, and discrimination towards women are not confined to the Office of the Ombudsman. Depending on the severity of the issue, some may prefer to lodge their complaint with the justice system, the Labour Department, or the Police. During the period of 1995 to 2014, the Office of the Ombudsman received three complaints from females concerning sexual harassment and victimization at the workplace, which resulted in independent investigations carried out for justice of the complainants. A total of 196 cases were brought before the national court by women for the period 1995–2014. The nature of the complaints include: rape, attempted rape, aiding and abetting minor to have sexual intercourse, unlawful carnal knowledge, buggery, sexual offences, serious indecency, sexual intercourse with minor, and unlawful sexual intercourse.

4. The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) project, supported by the government of Canada and the Caribbean Court of Justice, is in the process of establishing a Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC) within the high court of Antigua and Barbuda. The establishment of this specialized court is another measure that was taken by the government of Antigua and Barbuda to ensure that victims of gender-based violence have access to justice and reparations. The main objectives of the SOMC are as follows: provide timely, gender responsive and coordinated response to complainants of sexual assault cases; ensure greater coordination between the courts and agencies that provide services to sexual assault complainants; and improve the monitoring and evaluation for sexual offences. It is critical for us to take an evidence-based approach to support improvements in the treatment of sexual offences.

National Machinery for the Advancement of Women and National Human Rights Institutions

5. The current national five-year development plan was drafted with a number of inputs from various stakeholders. The Country Gender Assessment Report for Antigua and Barbuda was also used to determine gender priorities for the national development plan. Women's concerns were integrated within the country gender assessment and as such were also reflected in the national five-year plan. The state party is currently in the process of developing a national action plan for women and a gender mainstreaming strategy. The state party is also drafting the plan and strategy which is expected to be completed and launched in the first quarter of 2019, with

assistance from UN Women Multi-Country Office, Caribbean. The Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA) has the technical staff to fulfil its functions. For the period 2016 to present, the Directorate has had seven (7) technical officers; 3 with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Social and Development fields and 3, including the Executive Director, with Masters Degrees and Professional certifications, in the same related fields. There is one officer with professional certification. The technical staff is supported by 10 support officers. Additionally, for the year 2016 the Directorate of Gender Affairs received 5.67% of the Ministry of Social Transformation's budget in the sum of $853,231.00, in 2017 and 2018 the Directorate received 5.2% in the sum of $1,245,420.00.

6. Presently, there is not a national human rights institution. However, Antigua and Barbuda recognises the need for an institution to oversee compliance with international human rights obligations and establishing monitoring and evaluation systems such as a data system capable of generating information for the compilation of reports. Additionally, specific measures that have been taken to regularly collect disaggregated gender-specific data include the strengthening of our national statistical machinery through training and capacity building and the use of the CARICOM gender equality indicators.

Temporary Special Measures

7. Although Antigua and Barbuda has increased the number of women in leadership in the upper house of parliament, there are no sustainable special measures in place to accelerate greater participation by women in political life in line with the committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004).

Discriminatory gender stereotypes

Gender Discrimination within the Education Sector

8. Efforts have been made in Antigua and Barbuda for curricula to support the changing nature of gender labour roles, and further, to enable access for females to pursue courses in male-dominated fields, and vice versa. The newly drafted Education Sector Plan does not make explicit reference to encouraging or supporting the advancement of gender equality principles or articulate strategies that are taking place at the ground level to encourage girls and boys on dismantling gender-based stereotypes. However, recent years have seen the introduction of traditionally male-oriented subjects, such as Technical Drawing, into the curriculum of the nation's only government-run all-female secondary school, and Home Economics offered at the only government-run all-male secondary school. There have also been re-training of Early Childhood Educators, review of text books and also child friendly school initiatives that have integrated gender and highlighted gender stereotyping and discrimination as a barrier to achieving gender equality.

9. The Gilbert Rural Agricultural Development Centre (GARDC) is a non-governmental organization, supported by the government that has embarked on a multi-year initiative to promote and support women in the pursuit of non-traditional employment fields which maintain significant income potential, and focused primarily on trade skills.

Addressing Gender Stereotyping through Education and the Media

10. As part of its mandate the Directorate of Gender Affairs spearheads several initiatives and programmes designed to address discriminatory stereotypes with respect to the roles and responsibilities of women and men. The Directorate's annual national gender-based violence forum, Love Shouldn't Hurt, uses the performing arts to interrogate themes of gender stereotyping, discrimination, and gender-based

violence. In the past two years DoGA has been able to reach in excess of 1,000 persons annually through this annual event.

11. The Directorate also uses social media to engage and inform its public on discrimination against women and has used a number of local and international social media campaigns to speak out against victim-blaming that affects survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. DoGA's combined media outreach has reached wide cross section of the population within the period under review.

12. The Directorate continues to use International observances and campaigns such as International Women's Day (IWD) as a tool to discuss gender discrimination and stereotypes through various methods. In 2017, DoGA hosted a panel discussion on women in the changing world of work. In addition to focusing on women's equal access to the workplace, the panel also discussed elements of discrimination and harassment women face in employment. In 2018, the Directorate celebrated IWD with a Young Women's Social Justice Forum where the discussion was on how gender affects women's perceptions of themselves and can limit their access to education and employment with a view to empowering them to advocate for the empowerment of women and girls. Over the years however, this occasion has been used to heighten awareness on gender issues nationally and has encouraged solidarity building to address inequalities.

13. The Directorate also hosts frequent sensitization and awareness activities at local schools, and churches. These sessions focus not only on defining gender, gender-based and sexual violence, but also discuss the ways in which gender stereotyping leads to discrimination and violence, and how this violence impacts the community. One such initiative was the Community Classroom. The Community Classroom initiative was a two part initiative, which included eight (8) sessions geared towards exploring the root causes of gender-based and sexual violence within communities, specifically gender stereotyping and the rigid adherence to gender roles within a relationship. The event engaged community members and was held in collaboration with the faith-based organizations. DoGA has also led smaller sensitization activities targeting men, faith-based groups, youth, schools, teachers, parents, employers, private sector, community leaders, vulnerable populations and policy makers. We have also conducted similar sessions with national emergency shelter managers, healthcare providers, and members of the Royal Police Force, non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups.

14. As part of its responsibility to mainstream issues of gender through all sectors the Directorate of Gender Affairs includes a basic gender sensitization module in all its workshop activities. The Gender session covers basic definitions of gender and sex, and discusses how rigid gender roles and stereotyping can lead to discrimination and more extreme forms of violence and how this intersects with other areas of development. DoGA has included this module in its Work & Life Skills Programme (WLSP), which targeted over 500 youth within the period under review with the aim of preparing them for employment.

15. The "Youth for Change" Social Justice Conference was held to sensitize the public about the Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC) to be established in Antigua in 2019. The conference began with the Gender session to raise awareness of the role gender discrimination plays in instances of sexual assault and how they can impact the adjudication of these cases. Approximately 60 young men and women benefitted from this exercise. The conference also explored issues of consent and understanding the importance of advocacy and activism.

16. Through a grant from the United Nation Trust Fund Project for implementation of the National Strategic Action Plan against gender-based violence, DoGA created a series of videos or Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on a range of topics

including gender-based violence, gender stereotyping and discrimination. These videos, which have been aired on local radio and television, as well as DoGA's social media and web spaces, were produced in both English and Spanish in order to accommodate Antigua's growing Spanish-speaking population. DoGA has also produced over 5,000 Information Education Communication (IEC) materials including brochures, pamphlets, and info-sheets in both English and Spanish, providing information on DoGA's Support and Referral Centre (SARC), which offers services to all victims of gender-based violence and discrimination. Complementary to these PSA'S and IEC materials DoGA has also erected approximately thirty (30) billboards island-wide. Each billboard challenges a commonly-held gender stereotype, discourages all forms of gender-based violence, and prominently displays the DoGA SARC Crisis Hotline number for those in need of assistance.

17. DoGA does regular distribution of these materials at community events, such as the Sir Andy Roberts Community Fair, and at similar awareness-raising events, including the Clothesline Project Reception, hosted by the American University of Antigua (AUA); the World AIDS Day Street Fair hosted by the HIV/AIDS Secretariat; and the annual Police Week Street Fair, hosted by the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda.

18. DoGA's Support and Referral Centre (SARC) has a volunteer corps of advocates who assist victims of gender discrimination and violence. Currently the SARC has a team of both English and Spanish-speaking victims' advocates to assist members of the Spanish-speaking community who utilize SARC services. Training was provided to all volunteers on gender stereotyping and discrimination.

Eliminating Stigmatization and Discrimination against Female Migrants, and Women who are Internally Displaced

19. In addition to its work with the Spanish-speaking community, the Directorate has also aimed to offer support to displaced women living within Antigua and Barbuda. During the aftermath of Hurricane Irma in 2017, the population of Barbuda was temporarily displaced to Antigua. During DoGA's hurricane Irma response activities the Directorate, with support from UN Women, hosted a theatrical presentation targeting the displaced Barbudan population called "Light in the Dark". Light in the Dark addressed issues of gender discrimination, stereotyping, and gender-based and sexual violence that can occur in an emergency or post-emergency setting.

20. DoGA also commissioned a series of brochures and pamphlets about gender-based violence during emergencies which were distributed at local emergency shelters, and to the audience of approximately 200 persons at the premiere staging of Light in the Dark. Additionally, DoGA also reached a number of persons through its life-saving informational materials supported through UN Women Multi-Country Caribbean Office and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Eliminating Stigmatization and Discrimination against Women living with HIV/AIDS, and Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex women

21. Through a collaborative partnership with the HIV/AIDS Secretariat DoGA has been able to integrate the linkages between gender-based and sexual violence and HIV/AIDS transmission into its sensitization and awareness-raising materials. The HIV/AIDS Secretariat is one of DoGA's implementing partner agencies, and as such, the Directorate often works in concert with this agency to mainstream issues of gender, including gender discrimination and stereotyping into any HIV/AIDS-related programs and initiatives. This includes the observance of World AIDS Day during the 16 Days of Activism.

22. Outreach to the LGBT community has been historically low nationally however, there are plans to begin increased outreach to this community within the coming year.

Gender-based Violence against Women

23. The disaggregated statistical data for the Directorate of Gender Affairs and the Police, along with the number of cases brought to the court and the number of prosecutions, convictions and outcomes can be found in the Annex A respectively.

24. Additionally, women and girls who are victims of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) have access to comprehensive support services through the Directorate of Gender Affairs' Support and Referral Centre (SARC). Established in 2017, the SARC provides legal, medical, and psychosocial services to victims of GBSV and their immediate families, from one location. If requested, victims are able to receive a complete medical forensic examination from a District Doctor after a report of GBSV is made to the SARC or the Police. The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda reinstated its Sexual Offences Unit, which is now called the Special Victims Support Unit (SVSU) at the SARCs location, which is housed at the DoGA. The unit comprises of police officers who have received sensitization and capacity-building training to better meet the needs of this vulnerable group. Clients can also obtain assistance from the SARC when applying for an Order of Protection. Victims, and their families, are able to access psychosocial support, in the form of individual counselling, from the SARC Resident Counsellor. In addition to individual counselling, persons can access help from the national GBV Crisis Hotline which operates 24/7 and is manned by SARC staff and trained advocates. If needed, the SARC also assists its clients with referrals to other agencies to ensure that all of their identified needs and concerns are addressed. Antigua and Barbuda does not have an adequate facility that provides shelter to victims. However, in the absence of a shelter, the SARC has established a relationship with several unidentified hotels to provide emergency accommodation for clients in extreme situations for up to 48 hours.

25. The scope of the legislative review included recommendations to strengthen the Offences against the Person Act, Sexual Offences Act, Domestic Violence Summary Proceedings Act, 1999 and successes and opportunities from the 2015 Domestic Violence Act, Criminal Law Amendment Act and Trafficking in Persons Act. The legislative review highlighted existing gaps in the legislations and recommendations to address the gaps. The legislative review did not lead to any amendments within the Sexual Offences Act. The Sexual Offences Act 1995 does not recognise rape in marriage in all circumstances in accordance with Art 3(1) and 4(1) of the Convention. Additionally, the Domestic Violence Act (2015) includes marital rape as an offence of "domestic violence in the instance of marital separation i.e. a separation order; it does not unequivocally criminalise marital rape and define it based on lack of consent. However, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda recognises the need to have effective systems in place to deal with sexual violence and to this end a model sexual offences court (SOMC) is to be established in Antigua and Barbuda. The model court is a collaborative project with the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court and the JURIST project.

26. Antigua and Barbuda denounces sexual harassment in public places including the workplace, schools and public transport, and the government is developing a national prevention of harassment and discrimination policy which will be adopted in 2019. The government is also committed to passing legislation on Sexual Harassment which is modelled from the CARICOM and OECS model bills on sexual harassment. The model bill seeks to protect both women and men from unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and crude sexual behaviour that affects the quality of life by creating an intimidating, hostile and offensive environment.

Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution

27. The number of cases of trafficking in women and girls, investigated and prosecuted, as well as the number of convictions and the sentences imposed on the perpetrators from January 1st, 2015 to September 30th, 2018 can be found in Annex B.

28. The holistic well-being of all Trafficked Persons remains paramount to the State. The State established the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Secretariat in August 2017. Hence, in January of 2018, a Care and Support Services Officer was appointed to function from within the Secretariat and is responsible for coordinating and ensuring holistic Care and Support services are provided to all Trafficked Persons within the State. Through Task Force Cases, the Ministry of Public Safety is responsible for providing temporary residence for all Trafficked Persons which is also part of the holistic care. There are various points of detection for Trafficked Persons. Once contact is made at any point of entry, the information is immediately forwarded to Task Force Cases members, who are mandated to respond within fifteen (15) minutes of receiving any information. A 24-hours contingency plan is in place for additional security responses based on circumstances surrounding any detection leading up to the screening and interviewing of individuals. While the regularization of Immigration status is also part of the holistic care and support services provided to Trafficked Persons, Persons are always excited to return to their country of origin within a stipulated time. However, regularization of immigration status is done based on needs. Since information on Trafficked Persons is case sensitive, detailed information is not required in order to safeguard Trafficked Persons and all involved. With the increase in knowledge through various dialogues and sensitizations, steps are currently taken to further revise the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Act of 2010. Part five (V) of the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Act of 2010 provides information on measures to be taken by the State for the Identification and Protection of Trafficked Persons.

29. There have been no legislative steps taken to decriminalize women in prostitution or measures to reduce the demand for prostitution. However, there are social protection programs which can be used by women to exit prostitution. Further, apart from parenting workshops, there are no specific measures taken to prevent and address potential cases of exploitation of girls by their parents to supplement family income through prostitution. As it relates to migrant women, through the Department of Labour and Immigration and the Trafficking in Persons Secretariat, there are screening tools and protocols that are used to detect persons who are suspected trafficking victims and migrants. There are also specific victim-centred interventions that are implemented to ensure that their rights are protected once identified.

Participation in Political and Public Life

30. The Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership program is a measure that was used by the Directorate of Gender Affairs to increase women's representation in decision-making positions in parliament, government and the public service. Through the program, young women and female leaders were trained and supported to gain elected office, and assume other positions of leadership across the public service. Further, the President's Ten is another initiative developed and implemented by the President of the Senate to encourage and support young women's participation in public and political life. There are no other specific sustainable measures adopted by the government of Antigua and Barbuda.

Education

31. The government of Antigua and Barbuda's Education Policy prohibits the expulsion of pregnant girls and further supports their reintegration into the school system after childbirth. Presently, there is no comprehensive age-appropriate education on sexual or reproductive health within the school's curricula. There is a Health and Family Life Education curricula that is used which was referred to in the report.

Employment

32. There have been no reported cases of employers discriminating or terminating pregnant women because of their condition according to the Labour Department. The National Labour Board is currently revising the Labour Code to strengthen its implementation, and more specifically, will look at C4 (1) of the Labour Code to correct any loopholes that presently exist. Article C4 (1) of the Labour Code is respected throughout the country since the importance of equality is recognized. Since the enactment of the Labour Code, the Trades Unions and the Labour Department have not had to deal with any reported cases of sex discrimination under this law. There are no legislation or other mechanisms to decrease occupational segregation.

33. No steps have been taken to ensure that women who engage in unpaid domestic work or paid employment of less than six months have access to non-contributory social protection schemes, since persons must be registered. However, these individuals do have access to various social protection programs provided by the government.

34. Through the government's Elder Care program and Government Residential Assistant Care for the Elderly within the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender, at-home care for elderly persons is provided while their family members are out at work. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has commenced a kindergarten's initiative to assist parents who are not financially able to afford early childhood education for their young children. There are three preschools which have been integrated into the educational system at the following locations: Green Bay Primary School, Villa Primary School and the Simon Bolivar Preschool. Persons with disabilities can access the ADELE School for special needs and the National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Disability (NVRCD) within the Ministry of Health and the Environment, which is an agency where persons with disabilities who are able to work, can receive training to equip them for the job market. Further, those who are not able to work are taught how to make various items such as: jewellery, pot holders, floor mats, and the remodelling of shoes. Those enrolled at NVRCD are also involved in sailing and backyard gardening. The Centre operates in collaboration with Adele School, the School of and for the Blind and the Victory Centre. In terms of measures to promote equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, the National Labour Board plans to introduce paternity leave in the revised Labour Code.

Health

35. Women who stay at home to raise children or take care of other family without formal employment, or unemployed women, can access the Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS) by enrolling under the status of Voluntary Registration. The Medical Benefits Act, 2010, section 46 explains that provision:

"46. Un-employment and voluntary registration:

(1) A person who is not an employed person is not liable to pay contributions under this Act and may not receive benefits under this Act unless he is resident in Antigua and Barbuda and makes an application for and is issued with a certificate of voluntary registration;

(2) A certificate of voluntary registration is only valid for the period of time that the person to whom the certificate is issued is un-employed;

(3) A person who has been issued with a certificate of voluntary registration and is resident in Antigua and Barbuda is entitled to receive benefits pursuant to this Act;

(4) If a person who is registered under this Act and entitled to receive benefits pursuant to this Act becomes un-employed, he is entitled to continue to receive benefits for the three months immediately following the termination of his employment unless he has applied for and been issued with a certificate of voluntary registration;

(5) If a person whose employment was terminated and who was granted a certificate of voluntary registration regains employment after his employment was terminated, he shall return the certificate of voluntary registration to the Board and resume the payment of contributions in accordance with the Act;

(6) A person who contravenes subsection (5) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of two thousand dollars;

(7) Notwithstanding subsection (3), a person issued with a certificate of voluntary registration may be required to pay, within the time, in the manner and subject to conditions determined by the Board, a contribution at a prescribed rate;

(8) A default in paying the contribution at the rates and within the time prescribed by the Board may result in the cancellation of a certificate of voluntary registration and the benefits of the person to whom the certificate was issued."

36. Statistical information on the leading causes of death in Antigua and Barbuda, by year, can be found in Annex C. Please note that the tables only show disaggregated data for the top ten causes of death from 2004 through 2015. Therefore, the total number of deaths reported in a given year may exceed the number of deaths provided in the tables; since the causes of deaths that are ranked higher than 10 (11+) are not shown in the tables. This information was sourced by the Health Information Services Division- Data Collection Section within the Ministry of Health and the Environment.

37. Disaggregated data regarding the prevalence of HIV/AIDS between women and men, and patterns of transmission by age can be found in Annex D. This information was reported by the AIDS Secretariat.

38. The AIDS Secretariat provides various prevention, treatment, and health care programs that target vulnerable groups of women living with HIV/AIDS. The AIDS Secretariat distributes free commodities including male and female condoms, lubricants, and dental dams through the National AIDS Programme. The AIDS Secretariat also provides free confidential HIV and syphilis testing; and persons who have tested positive for HIV receive free antiretroviral medication, aligning with the World Health Organization testing and treatment recommendations. Additionally, outreach activities targeting vulnerable groups of women with HIV/AIDS, including transgender women and women in prostitution, are organized to help facilitate access to all clinical and treatment services. These outreach initiatives help to encourage

adherence to treatment, provide supportive counselling when needed, and address other social needs and concerns that may arise.

39. In order to provide services without stigma and discrimination, the National AIDS Programme has established a system where sex workers, who access services, are given three (3) cards for distribution amongst other known sex workers. This allows them, and other sex workers, to access services without any challenges. In addition to the card system, the National AIDS Program offers free and confidential testing. Community Service Organizations also provide free and confidential testing to key vulnerable populations within the community.

40. As part of the review of legislation commissioned by the Directorate of Gender Affairs, the recommendation was made to amend the Offences against the Person Act of 1873 (cap. 58, part IX, section 53–54). To date, there is no active consideration to amend the legislation, especially in cases of rape, incest, threats to the life of the pregnant woman and severe foetal impairment; however, there will be continuous lobbying for its amendment. Presently, there are private medical doctors who provide safe abortion services and the Mount St. John's Medical Centre, the state's primary hospital, also provide post-abortion services without discrimination and services are free for persons under 18.

Economic Empowerment of Women and Rural Women

41. A Financial Empowerment Centre (FEC) was established and is geared towards fostering financial independence for citizens of Antigua and Barbuda, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, on budgeting and other financial management. Free professional financial advice is provided in four main areas: savings, budgeting, debt reduction and safe banking. The government has implemented measures to increase access to credit and loans. The government provides low interest loans to vulnerable individuals through its development bank. The government through its Central Housing and Planning Authority has made land and home ownership easily accessible to low income individuals, particularly women. The government has also established relationships with lending agencies to assist persons with land and home ownership. The Transport Board has a National School Bus system in place which provides free, daily transportation for children to and from school, with pickups from various points on island. Further, the government introduced a Home Advancement Repair Initiative (HAPPI), capped at XCD $20,000.00 which repairs homes for many single-headed households of which women are usually the beneficiaries. The grants for home improvement over $20,000.00 must be approved by the Cabinet.

Natural Disaster

42. Antigua and Barbuda is highly susceptible to hurricanes, earthquakes and other hazards/disasters. In regards to the integration of gender perspectives into national disaster management, relief and recovery strategies, steps are being taken for there to be a greater awareness of the importance of mainstreaming gender into this area. The National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) works closely with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), which is the regional inter-governmental entity for disaster management and they have been including gender considerations into their plans for early warning systems, disaster risk reduction, and disaster shelters. Representatives from the Directorate of Gender Affairs and the National Office of Disaster Services from Antigua were present at a regional validation meeting that was held on June 7 and 8, 2018 where discussions were had specifically on the lessons learnt following the Caribbean 2017 hurricane season. Gender focal points from around the region were in attendance and were able to provide gender knowledge to the meteorological and disaster representatives with respect to some of the key considerations that disaster agencies need to be cognizant

of in their planning. The Antiguan Deputy Director for the National Office of Disaster Services was present and was able to build capacity in this regard. Therefore, there are efforts made to develop a gender-responsive disaster risk reduction plan in Antigua and Barbuda. Furthermore, a gender-responsive early warning system was established and recently launched in Antigua and Barbuda in October, 2018.

43. The entity responsible for disaster management and disaster risk reduction in Antigua (NODS) also recognizes and understands the importance of ensuring the participation of women in consultations on disaster risk reductions and climate change initiatives. NODS has held various consultations which gave women the opportunity to participate and air their thoughts. Women have also been trained as shelter managers and shelter workers as part of the emergency response mechanism. The Department of Environment also hosts a number of consultations and focus group discussions within communities on climate change issues which targets vulnerable groups and are led by community women. The outcomes of the consultations are integrated into national planning, response, project proposals and budgeting on disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and resilience.

44. In terms of the access that women and girls who were most affected by the recent hurricanes have to livelihood support and other relief and recovery efforts, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda supported the displaced Barbudan families providing free meals, accommodations, as well as free schooling for the children at various educational institutions across Antigua. Local supermarkets and NGOs also provided vouchers with amounts of varying value to vulnerable Barbudans, providing free groceries. NODS distributed these vouchers for up to a year, following the hurricanes but with less frequency. The Directorate also was proactive in regards to distributing dignity kits where required following the disaster to all persons affected through the support of UN Women Multi-Country Office Caribbean and United Nations Population Fund. These kits provided key hygienic items for women and girls that may not have been easily or readily accessible to all. Additionally, the Directorate attended a homecoming return to Barbuda following the Hurricane. The Directorate was able to raise awareness to our services while there and used the opportunity to distribute IEC materials and engage the disaster response coordinator for Barbuda in strengthening response and prevention for gender-based violence.

Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Women

45. The provisions for asylum protection in Antigua and Barbuda is in accordance to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Antigua and Barbuda acceded to the Convention and its Protocol on September 7, 1995. Article 1 of the Convention as amended by the 1967 Protocol defines a refugee as a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or; owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. However, the adoption of the Convention and Protocol is not gender sensitive. Antigua and Barbuda denounces human trafficking and the Trafficking in Persons Prevention (Amendment) Act 2015 has strengthened the provisions for the prevention of human trafficking and allows for protection of its victims. The 2015 amendment strengthens and compliments the 2010 Act and provides for the establishment of a Trafficking in Persons Prevention Committee with has the power to formulate policies and programmes to fulfil he objectives of the Act. Similarly, the Migrant Smuggling Prevention Amendment Act 2015 strengthens the Migrant Smuggling Prevention Act 2010 and provides for

increased penalties under the legislation. This gives effect to the seriousness of the offence and the international ramifications.

Marriage and Family Relations

46. The Marriage Act 1925 outlines that the age of consent to marriage is 18 years of age. In addition, the Act provides in S.26(1) that 'where either of the parties, not being a widower or widow, is under the age of eighteen years, no marriage shall take place between them until the consent of the persons or person required by this Act has been first obtained'. Furthermore, S25 of the Act provides that "a marriage solemnized between persons either of whom is under the age of fifteen shall be null and void." In summary persons under the age of 18 may marry with the consent of a parent or legal guardian. However, marriage cannot legally take place between persons below the age of 15.

47. Under the laws of Antigua and Barbuda there is no distinction between children born in wedlock or as the result of a common law union in accordance with the Status of Children Act 2015. This means that all women with children including those of a common law union are entitled to claim maintenance in accordance with the Maintenance and Access to Children Act 2008. There is no provision for the recognition of a common law relationship under the laws of Antigua and Barbuda therefore, there is no absolute right to assets on dissolution of the relationship. However, persons are entitled to the percentage of contribution to any asset purchased. Additionally, the Registered Land Act 1975 makes provision for the ownership of property as joint tenants or tenants in common, the provisions of which are outlined by the statute.

Amendment to Article 20 (1) of the Convention

48. Antigua and Barbuda is presently considering its position on the acceptance of the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time for the Committee.